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13. DISTRIBUTION OF MASKED FINFOOT *HELIOPAIS PERSONATA* IN THE SUNDARBANS RESERVED FOREST OF BANGLADESH

Introduction

The Sundarbans Reserved Forest (SRF) of Bangladesh, the home of the Bengal Tiger, is a unique habitat for wildlife, especially for avian biodiversity. It is the world's largest contiguous block of mangrove forest, with an area of c. 6,017 sq. km, managed by the Forest Department since 1884 (Cannonizado and Hossain 1998). Of the total area, 4,143 sq. km is landmass, while 1,874 sq. km is water bodies. The Sundarbans mangrove forest is situated in south-western Bangladesh, between 21° 39' 00"-22° 30' 15" N and 89° 2' 00"-89° 54' 07" E. There are 32 species of mammals, 8 species of amphibians, 14 species of turtles, 30 species of snakes, 35 species of other reptiles, 186 species of birds (Hossain and Acharya 1994), 196 species of fishes (Bernacsek 2000) and 334 species of plants (Prain 1903) recorded. The Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* (G.R. Gray 1849 (1848)) is the only species of the Order Gruiformes found in the Sub-Himalayan region, in northeast India and in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh. This bird is also distributed in Myanmar, Malaysia and Thailand (Khan 2000). Grimmett *et al.* (1998) reported that the Masked Finfoot is a rare resident or visitor in Bangladesh. The Masked Finfoot found in Bangladesh Sundarbans is a resident. Not much literature is available on the biology of the Masked Finfoot in this region. Khan (2000) reported that it is endangered in Bangladesh and globally vulnerable.

The Masked Finfoot is a duck-like bird sparsely distributed over a large forest area of the Bangladesh Sundarbans. It is locally known as *Hans Pakhi*. Khan (2000) reported the Bangla name *Goilo Hansh*. This bird is usually found in tidal channels of dense swampy mangrove forest, which are relatively undisturbed. It was seen most of the time in

pairs, standing at the shores of the small rivers and channels. These channels and small rivers are locally known as *khals*. Sometimes the birds were found sitting on the trunk of baen trees (*Avicennia officinalis*) inclined over the *khals*. The head, neck and some part of the back is visible while swimming. The Masked Finfoot is very shy, solitary, and sometimes tries to hide in the grass if approached by people or boats. Khan (2000) reported its breeding from July-August and nests at a height of 1-3 m on horizontal branches of trees, built with twigs.

Distribution

A total of 24 Masked Finfoot were sighted in the SRF from 1999 to 2001. They were mostly seen in the freshwater zone that is in the eastern part of river Shipsa of the Sundarbans mangroves. The maximum sighting was recorded while cruising in the Tambulbunia *khal*. Eight individuals were sighted in four different locations. This *khal* appeared to be relatively undisturbed. The maximum western limit of sighting of the Masked Finfoot is the Sarbatkhal *khal* of Khulna Range of the Sundarbans West Forest Division, which is also located in the freshwater zone, east of the river Shipsa. This bird is normally seen in the Katka and Kachikhali *khal* of the Sundarbans East Sanctuary and near the western entry point of the Mara Bhola *khal*, which is located in the moderately saltwater zone. Besides these sites, the Masked Finfoot was seen in the Bara Morogmari *khal* and Jongra *khal* of the Sundarbans East Forest Division. None were ever sighted in the saltwater zone (Fig. 1), though the area was extensively searched and inquiries made. This bird was sighted over an area of 2000 sq. km. Each site was far from the others, so the

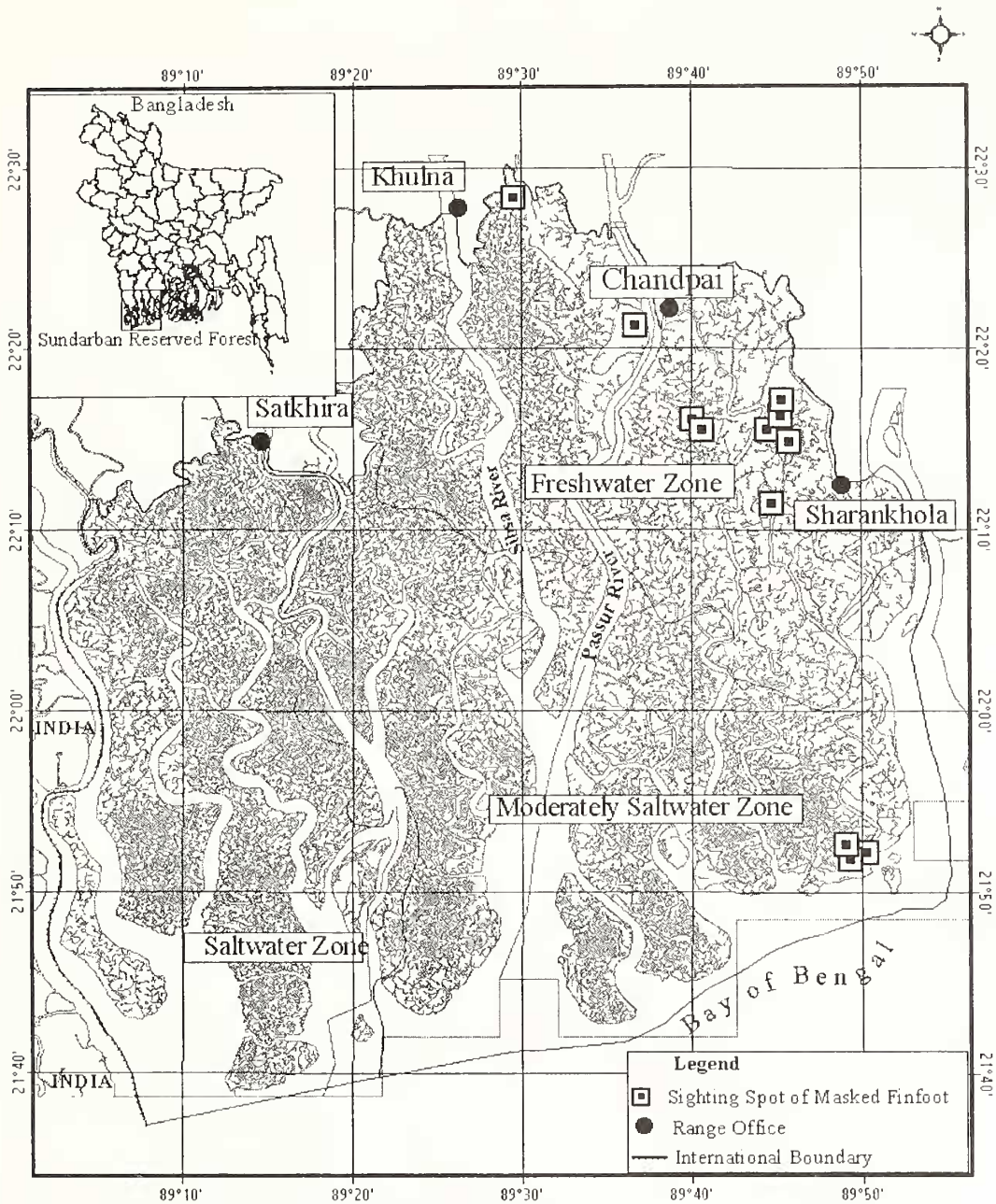


Fig. 1: Map showing sighting spot of Masked Finfoot in Sundarban Reserved Forest

(Scale = 1: 500,000)

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chance of overlapping is almost nil. They were never sighted flying above the forest canopy (about 8-10 m) of Sundarbans, and their call was never heard during sightings. When trying to hide, they walk or swim away swiftly and fly low over short distances.

Information on breeding, nesting and poaching in Bangladesh Sundarbans should be collected. As the birds disappear from the area during harvesting of forest produce, there should be more undisturbed areas reserved for Masked

Finfoot to increase their population. Certain forest areas of Sharonkhola and Chandpai Range of Sundarbans East Forest Division may be preserved thus.

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14. TERRITORIAL FIGHTING BEHAVIOUR OF GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD *ARDEOTIS NIGRICEPS*

Territorial fight in the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* occurs frequently among adult males during the breeding season (Rahmani 1989). Territorial fights between cocks were seen on seven occasions in Vingaber, Kachchh, Gujarat in the presence of females.

During territorial fights, males were in display and no change in posture between display and fighting was obvious

on all the occasions except for the erecting of crown feathers. Rahmani (1989) also reported that the fighting posture is similar to the display posture. As soon as the intruder was seen, the owner approached it, either with a short flight (if the intruder was slightly away), or with a rapid walk. After this approach, both the males started marching parallel to each other with their tails half or fully cocked for about 5 to 25 m (Fig. 1), then



Figs 1-6: Sequence of territorial fighting behaviour of the Great Indian Bustard